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Ministry of Advanced Education

$522K WILL BUILD ABORIGINAL GATHERING PLACE AT KWANTLEN

SURREY – The Province is providing Kwantlen University College with $522,000 to build a gathering place on its Surrey campus that will enhance support services for the growing number of Aboriginal students there, Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell announced today.

"We want to encourage more Aboriginal students to enrol at Kwantlen University College and other post-secondary institutions around B.C., and this gathering place will welcome and support them as they work to complete their education," Coell said. "This funding is part of the Province's $65-million strategy to help Aboriginal students start, stay in and succeed in programs that will prepare them to take part in B.C.'s strong economy."

Kwantlen plans to create its gathering space by renovating an underused classroom, hallway and two offices. A private entrance will open onto a forest, central courtyard and pond. Renovations will include lighting and window upgrades, new finishes and furnishings as well as ceremonial art installations. An independent mechanical system will be retrofitted so smudge ceremonies can take place without affecting other areas of the building.

"Kwantlen is especially happy because we have a very close relationship with our First Nations – particularly Kwantlen First Nations, from whom we take our name and who consider us a part of their family," said Kwantlen president Skip Triplett.

Up to $15 million will be provided for Aboriginal gathering places at public post-secondary institutions over the next three years. Besides Kwantlen University College, the first round of funding includes Okanagan College, Northern Lights College, the College of the Rockies, Langara College and the College of New Caledonia.

"We are breaking down the barriers that have prevented so many of our Aboriginal people from being all they can be," Coell said. "At the same time, we're helping our province meet skills shortages by making sure the growing number of young Aboriginal people in B.C. have the knowledge and skills to build great careers."

More than 17,200 First Nation, Métis and Inuit students attended B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions in 2007, an increase of more than 16 per cent since 2002. However, according to B.C. Statistics, a non-Aboriginal person is five times as likely to have a university degree as an Aboriginal person living on reserve, and almost three times more likely than an Aboriginal person off reserve.

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Improving quality and choice in education is a key pillar of the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda. The gathering places funding also supports the government's commitments through the Transformative Change Accord and the Métis Nation Relationship Accord to close the gaps by 2015 in education, health, housing, and economic opportunities that separate Aboriginal British Columbians from other residents.

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